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### Making Sense of Pain and Trouble

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# Making Sense of Pain and Trouble

I still remember it as if it were yesterday, even though it happened 30 years ago. I was in my study working on a writing project when our two young children burst into the room. “Jesus is here! Jesus is here! We heard the trumpets!”

Not having heard the trumpets myself, who was I to question such jubilant faith? I went with them outside to look up into the blue sky. Alas, Jesus did not come that day, but I still remember with joy that infectious excitement at the coming of our Lord.<sup>1</sup>

How is your hope these days? Do you still sense the same excitement as when you first believed? In this strange era of the COVID-19 pandemic I suggest three lessons from the biblical teaching on the second coming of Jesus that bring hope in a time of crisis.

## **GOD IS STILL IN CONTROL**

Jesus gave a panoramic picture of world events from the time of His earthly ministry to the day of His return in glory. The prophecy can be found in Mark 13 (cf. Matt. 24; Luke 21). Let me draw your attention to two verses that provide the first lesson.

Jesus says, “When you hear about wars and rumors of wars, do not be shaken. It has to be like that, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places. There will be famines [Luke adds “pestilences”]. These are the beginning of the birth pains” (Mark 13:7, 8).<sup>2</sup>

We often repeat these words when talking about the Second Coming because they sound so parallel to what our world has experienced during the past century. In actual fact, Jesus was talking about the time leading up to the

destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. But we can still learn from that experience for our situation today.

Jesus said, “Do not be shaken” (verse 7). Whenever I have gone through trouble in my life, it disrupts my status quo. I remember well a time 20 years ago when our family went through job loss, major surgery, death of relatives, and a devastating weather event, all within a few months. That experience was so numbing, such a fog—I just yearned for “boring” normal days. What carried us through the trouble were two things: precious friends and the promises of the Bible. It’s still the same for this current crisis.

Jesus said, “It has to be like that” (verse 7). He’s not the one who brings the trouble—that’s the devil. But our Lord also indicates that in a world of sin bad things happen. He doesn’t sugarcoat the truth of the trials we will face. We



may think that small comfort, but actually, knowing that He knows how things will turn out is a steady rock beneath our feet in the storm. He sees all the trouble and points to something higher and better that is coming.

Jesus continues: “These are the beginning of the birth pains” (verse 8). We like to think that the trouble will end quickly. Sometimes it does. But when it comes to the cosmic conflict between good and evil, Jesus is in it for the long haul. The great controversy is not a sprint—it’s a marathon. But He assures us that He sees the end from the beginning. He is our guide, taking us through troubling times. He gives us His assurance that He is in control of our life and will carry us through. We must not be alarmed by the events, but lift up our heads as our redemption draws near (Luke 21:28). The first lesson—*God is still in control*.

### LIFT SOMEONE UP

The second lesson is the call to help others around us. It’s tempting to draw back when trouble strikes. But Jesus beckons us to look outward.

The Lord describes His return when He will separate sheep from goats. What distinguishes the two groups is not profession but acts of mercy. The Lord says, “I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat. I was thirsty and you gave Me a drink. I was a foreigner and you welcomed Me; naked and you clothed Me; sick and you visited Me; in prison and you came to Me” (Matt. 25:35, 36). Jesus identifies Himself with those in need. When we help them, we are doing it to Him personally.

*Look for someone to bless in this crisis.* You may not be able to do much, but even a little helps them and really blesses you.

### HANG ON TO HOPE

Some people may be getting tired of waiting for Jesus. Don’t. The reality of the Second Coming doesn’t depend just on the fulfillment of prophetic signs. It depends still more on the One who promised He would come back. The Lord says, “If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am you may be also” (John 14:3).

In Greek the “I will come again” is actually a present tense: “I am coming again.” In this context it is known as a “futuristic present.” A future event spoken of with such certainty is described as though it were already happening. We can fairly translate it, “If I go and prepare a place for you, I will *most certainly* come again and receive you to Myself.”

The Second Coming depends not just on the fulfillment of prophetic signs. Much more it depends on the One who made the promise.

So what makes sense of all the trouble around us? Three great lessons: (1) God is still in control; trust Him; (2) get involved in lifting others up; it will lift you up as well; (3) remember who made the promise; He’s coming back for us.

That wonderful day will come soon when we will all shout, “Jesus is here! Jesus is here! We heard the trumpets!” ©

<sup>1</sup> As it turns out, big sister was playing a trick on her little brother, making a trumpet sound. Nevertheless, I treasure the joyful faith of that moment. Both of my grown children have given me permission to tell this story.

<sup>2</sup> All translations are my own.

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